It is now over sixty years since those early months of 1947 when a Bedouin boy threw a stone into a cave on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea and struck clay jars stuffed with dirty, smelly rolled up scrolls and decaying bits of ancient leather.1 Given the political realities of life in Jerusalem and Bethlehem in wartime conditions, coupled with a long-standing skepticism about whether any written materials on leather or papyrus could really survive from Greco-Roman era, conditions were such that even those most closely involved did not quickly grasp the real significance of the find. But already by March 1948, William F. Albright, the world-renowned biblical scholar and epigraphist at John Hopkins University had seen some of the first photographs and was ready to pronounce these seven scrolls “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times! … an absolutely incredible find!”2 The publication of a scholarly edition of all of these materials, the remains of approximately nine hundred manuscripts recovered from eleven caves, proved to be a long and complicated process; the first editions began to appear in the mid 1950s,3 and the last volume of the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series was not completed until early in 2009.4

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1 For the earliest accounts of the discoveries and an analysis of some of the problems and discrepancies in the oral stories, see the discussion of Weston W. Fields, The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Full History (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), 24–25, 520–521.
2 Letter of W.F. Albright, received by John Trever in Jerusalem on March 15, 1948; quoted in Fields, The Dead Sea Scrolls, 76.
The occasion of the fiftieth (1997) and sixtieth (2007) anniversaries of the discovery of the scrolls called forth numerous academic conferences and survey volumes that attempted to articulate and synthesize the wide ranging importance and influence of this discovery for the study of the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism, New Testament, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Septuagint, Hebrew and Aramaic linguistics, and still more related fields of scholarship. But it seems to me that the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has also played a role, both directly and indirectly, in the Jewish-Christian dialogue as it has developed in the post-World War II era. Influences and relationships of this type are less easy to isolate and to document, and surprisingly little has been written assessing the influence of the scrolls from this perspective. The question that I want to take up is quite specific: has the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls been important for how Jews and Christians understand themselves and relate to each other? If so, how, and to what extent?

When we turn to a standard reference work like the *Lexikon der jüdisch-christlichen Begegnung*, we find only a rather brief entry on the scrolls, their content and history, and the author, Clemens Thoma, concludes with the evaluation: “für den Dialog zwischen Christen und Juden ist Qumran von untergeordneter Bedeutung.” The more recent *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* from the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations likewise commissioned only a very short article on the Dead Sea Scrolls and did not think it necessary to turn to a scholar who had worked directly and primarily on the Qum-

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6 The stimulus for my thinking about the question in these terms came from a conference held at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 2005, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, the document from the Second Vatican Council that treated, albeit very briefly, relations with the Jews and laid the foundation for subsequent theological reflection for both Roman Catholics and many other Christian churches.